

D-728
W. T. Ruark & Company
Fishing Creek
Private

1948, 1998

Built at the head of Back Creek in the village of Fishing Creek on Upper Hooper's Island, this two-part crab house was erected in 1948 and later enlarged with a two-story concrete block office fifty years later. The single-story frame and concrete block crab house dating from 1948 has a linear plan like many other seafood packing facilities. The retort or steam room is located at the east end of the building adjacent to the waterfront. The picking and packing rooms occupy the center of the structure. Although the W. T. Ruark & Company facility at Fishing Creek is not the oldest packinghouse in Dorchester County, the 1948 structure survives with largely intact exterior and interior features.

William T. Ruark was born in 1907 and managed a packinghouse for White and Nelson on Old House Point for many years. In 1948 he established his own company across the harbor at the north end of Back Creek. Ruark packed oysters, crabmeat, and hard and soft-shell crabs. His son, W. T. Ruark, Jr. began working with his father while he was still in high school in 1948. In the 1950s and 1960s the company sold oysters, rockfish and crabmeat to Baltimore companies. Ruark was one of the first packers to sell live crabs to restaurants and grocery stores in Baltimore to be steamed for customers to pick. At first the live crabs were packed in sugar barrels with a lump of ice to keep them cool. William T. Ruark, Sr. died in 1965 and his son and daughter-in-law took over the business. In the 1970s the company sold crabmeat, hard and soft crabs, and oysters, and they ran as well a subsidiary plant on Tar Bay. (See D-729) The Ruarks still operate the business with a mixture of local and migrant workers.

Maryland Historical Trust

Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties Form

Inventory No. D-728

1. Name of Property (indicate preferred name)

historic W. T. Ruark & Company, Inc.
other _____

2. Location

street and number 2762 Hoopers Island Road _____ not for publication
city, town Fishing Creek vicinity _____
county Dorchester

3. Owner of Property (give names and mailing addresses of all owners)

name William T. Ruark, Jr.
street and number 2762 Hoopers Island Road telephone 410-397-3142
city, town Church Creek state Maryland zip code 21622

4. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Dorchester County Clerk of Court liber PLC 232 folio 189
city, town Cambridge tax map 93 tax parcel 6 tax ID number 6-092209

5. Primary Location of Additional Data

- ____ Contributing Resource in National Register District
____ Contributing Resource in Local Historic District
____ Determined Eligible for the National Register/Maryland Register
____ Determined Ineligible for the National Register/Maryland Register
____ Recorded by HABS/HAER
____ Historic Structure Report or Research Report at MHT
____ Other: _____

6. Classification

Category	Ownership	Current Function		Resource Count	
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape	Contributing	Noncontributing
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce/trade	<input type="checkbox"/> recreation/culture	<u>1</u>	<input type="checkbox"/> buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> defense	<input type="checkbox"/> religion	<u>_____</u>	<input type="checkbox"/> sites
<input type="checkbox"/> site		<input type="checkbox"/> domestic	<input type="checkbox"/> social	<u>_____</u>	<input type="checkbox"/> structures
<input type="checkbox"/> object		<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation	<u>_____</u>	<input type="checkbox"/> objects
		<input type="checkbox"/> funerary	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<u>1</u>	<input type="checkbox"/> Total
		<input type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> unknown		
		<input type="checkbox"/> health care	<input type="checkbox"/> vacant/not in use		
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> other:		

**Number of Contributing Resources
previously listed in the Inventory**

7. Description

Inventory No. D-728

Condition

<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> altered

Prepare both a one paragraph summary and a comprehensive description of the resource and its various elements as it exists today.

The W. T. Ruark & Company crab house is located at 2762 Hoopers Island Road in Fishing Creek on Hoopers Island, Dorchester County, Maryland. The frame and concrete block crab house is situated on a narrow strip of land between the road and the edge of Back Creek on man-made ground. The front of the crab house has a southern exposure while the principal roof is oriented on an east/west axis.

Built in 1948 the single-story frame crab house is ten bays across and a single room in depth with a open shed porch extending across the full front of the crab house. The crab house is situated next to a dock with a protective flat roofed shelter erected for loading and unloading. Attached to the northeast corner of the crab house is a single-story concrete and frame cooler building. Extending the crab house on its west gable end is a two-story rough faced concrete and frame addition erected in 1998 for a new office. The crab house and cooler building are covered by medium pitched gable roof sheathed with metal, whereas the new office has an asphalt shingle covering. A single flue, concrete block chimney pierces the roofline of the frame section.

The south side of the 1948 frame crab house is sheltered by a shed roofed porch that houses at its east end the retort or steam box. The shed roof porch has a concrete block knee wall. The porch shelters a series of single-pane windows as well as the double door entrance into the building at the west end.

The east gable end of the crab house is defined by a concrete block knee wall that supports a screened series of panels. Enclosed within the screened-in section is a wide passage that leads to the concrete block cooler on the northeast corner of the building.

The north side of the 1948 crab house is defined by a series of single-pane window openings. Protruding through the north wall is the end of a conveyor system for the removal of crab waste outside the picking room. A small gable roof concrete block structure covered with a low pitched gable roof stands off the north side of the crab house. A side entrance to the cooler pierces its west wall.

Attached to the west gable end of the frame crab house is a two-story rough-faced concrete block addition erected in 1998. The rectangular structure houses the company office, and the side walls are pierced by single-pane sash windows. The gable ends are framed and sheathed with vinyl siding. The edge of the roof has a slightly extended eave on each gable end, and a boxed cornice trims the base of the roof.

The interior of the crab house has poured concrete floors and board walls and a board ceiling. Double door openings allow movement between the picking and packing rooms.

8. Significance

Inventory No. D-728

Period	Areas of Significance	Check and justify below		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> health/medicine	<input type="checkbox"/> performing arts
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> invention	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-1999	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment/ recreation	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 2000-	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> ethnic heritage	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/ settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> social history
	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning		<input type="checkbox"/> maritime history	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation		<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> other:

Specific dates

Architect/Builder

Construction dates 1948, 1998

Evaluation for:

☐ National Register

☐ Maryland Register

☒ not evaluated

Prepare a one-paragraph summary statement of significance addressing applicable criteria, followed by a narrative discussion of the history of the resource and its context. (For compliance projects, complete evaluation on a DOE Form – see manual.)

Built at the edge of Back Creek in the village of Fishing Creek on Upper Hooper's Island, the two-part crab house was erected in 1948 and later enlarged with a two-story concrete block office fifty years later. The single-story frame and concrete block crab house dating from 1948 follows a linear plan like many other seafood packing facilities. The retort room is located at the east end of the building with the picking room occupying the center of the structure. Although the W. T. Ruark & Company facility at Fishing Creek is not the oldest packinghouse in Dorchester County, the 1948 structure survives with largely intact exterior and interior features.

HISTORY AND SUPPORT

William T. Ruark was born in 1907 and managed a packinghouse for White and Nelson on Old House Point for many years. This is now the location of the Terrapin Fish Company. In 1948, he established his own company across the harbor at Fishing Creek, Maryland. Ruark packed oysters, crabmeat and hard and soft shell crabs. His son, W. T. Ruark, Jr., began working with his father while he was still in high school in 1948. In the 1950s and 1960s the company sold oysters, rockfish and crabmeat to Baltimore companies such as the McNasby Oyster Company, Atlantic Fish Company, Bay Harbor Seafood, S. Dipaula & Son, W. T. Freburger Company, and Food Fair Stores.¹ The fish were iced and sold whole to markets in Baltimore and Philadelphia. Ruark was one of the first packers to sell live crabs to restaurants and grocery stores in Baltimore to be steamed for customers to pick. At first the live crabs were packed in sugar barrels with a lump of ice to keep them cool. Later crabs were sold by the bushel basket. When the Maryland crab harvest declined in the 1950s, the company purchased crabs from Jesse Etherridge in Wauchee, North Carolina, and the Duvall Fish & Crab Company in Manns Harbor, North Carolina.² Agnes K. Ruark began working for the company in 1954 when she married William T. Ruark, Jr. Forty-five (45) people were employed during the crab picking season in 1955. The company packed oysters for about four years selling to the McNasby Oyster Company in Baltimore, but quit in the mid 1950s because they could not make money at it.³

¹ Marhsall's Express Freight Bills dated September 7, 1960 in the collection of Kevin Davidson, Cambridge, Maryland.

² Shipping Certifications dated November 1959 in the collection of Kevin Davidson, Cambridge, Maryland.

³ Invoices dated December 28, 1954 and January 6, 1955 in the collection of Kevin Davidson, Cambridge, Maryland; Interview with Agnes Ruark, Fishing Creek, May 31, 2001.

Maryland Historical Trust

Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties Form

Inventory No. D-728

Name W. T. Ruark & Company, Inc.
Continuation Sheet

Number 8 Page 1

In 1954 Edmund H. Parker and Willie T. Ruark trading as W. T. Ruark and Company, purchased 20,847 square feet of land on Tar Bay on Upper Hoopers Island in Honga. They built a concrete block crab house and ran it from 3 to 8 p.m. The women crabpickers would work in Fishing Creek from 4 a.m. until 1 p.m., then go home and have dinner, and go to work again in Honga for a second shift. A separate fleet of workboats came into the Honga Creek and it was better to have a second facility there than to bring the crabs by truck the mile or so to Fishing Creek. The Tar Bay plant closed around 1960.

William T. Ruark, Sr. died in 1965 and his son and daughter-in-law took over the business. In the 1970s the company sold crabmeat, hard and soft shell crabs, and oysters, and had a subsidiary packinghouse in Honga on Hooper's Island. In 1977, the Fishing Creek plant employed 35 people; seven men and 28 women.⁴

The number of employees has remained stable until the present, but the firm no longer processes oysters. At the peak of the business they had 65 pickers, all local women from Hoopers Island. The company began to employ Mexican migrant workers hired under the Federal H2-B non-agricultural temporary worker program in 1992.⁵ In 2001, they employed 27 Mexicans and 4 local women. The Ruarks continue to purchase crabs from North Carolina and Virginia, and sell crabmeat to restaurants and wholesalers in Ocean City, Maryland and Rehoboth, Delaware, Washington DC, and Baltimore, Maryland. Their brand name is "Best Yet." The company has a fleet of eight trucks that are driven to Baltimore and Ocean City daily. A broker handles most of their crabmeat. Crab chum is taken to Spicers Lumber yard to be mixed with sawdust for fertilizer.⁶

⁴ *Directory of the Maryland Manufacturers 1977-78*, Maryland Department of Economic and Community Development, p. 166.

⁵ Interview with William T. Ruark, Jr., Fishing Creek, April 27, 1999, Oral History 128.

⁶ Interview with Agnes Ruark, Fishing Creek, Maryland, May 31, 2001.

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Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties Form

Inventory No. D-728

Name W. T. Ruark & Company, Inc.
Continuation Sheet

Number 8 Page 2

William T. Ruark, Jr.
2762 Hoopers Island Road
Church Creek, Dorchester County, Maryland
Chain of title

Map 93, Parcel 6

PLC 232/189

Agnes K. Ruark, widow

to

6/30/1954

William T. Ruark, Jr.
.45 acres, point in Fishing Creek, Upper Hoopers Island

RSM 89/338

Emory E. Parker & Eva E. Parker

to

6/30/1954

Edmond H. Parker & Sybil J. Parker
Willie T. Ruark & Agnes K. Ruark
Co-partners in the trading as W. T. Ruark and Company

Containing 20,847 square feet of land, now improved by a newly erected
packing house and appurtenances.....

WHM 5/271

T. Sangston Insley, trustee

to

11/4/1918

Emory E. Parker

All that tract....situated on Upper Hooper's Island...being all of the land
that constituted the home place of the late Charles R. Parker, including the
the land across the road, therefrom and used in connection with the said home
place, containing forty acres of land more or less....

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Historic Properties Form

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Name W. T. Ruark & Company, Inc.

Continuation Sheet

Number 8 Page 3

FJH 7/635

William L. Meekins

to

5/16/1870

Charles R. Parker

9. Major Bibliographical References

Inventory No. D-728

Dorchester County Land Records, various volumes, Dorchester County Courthouse.
(For full list of resources see footnotes)

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of surveyed property .45 acre
Acreage of historical setting 1/2 acre
Quadrangle name Honga, Maryland

Quadrangle scale: 1:24,000

Verbal boundary description and justification

The historic metes and bounds of this property are coincidental with the current boundary of the lot.

11. Form Prepared by

name/title	Paul B. Touart, Architectural Historian and Virginia Jenkins, Business Historian		
organization	Private Consultants	date	6/10/2001
street & number	P. O. Box 5	telephone	410-651-1094
city or town	Westover	state	Maryland 21871

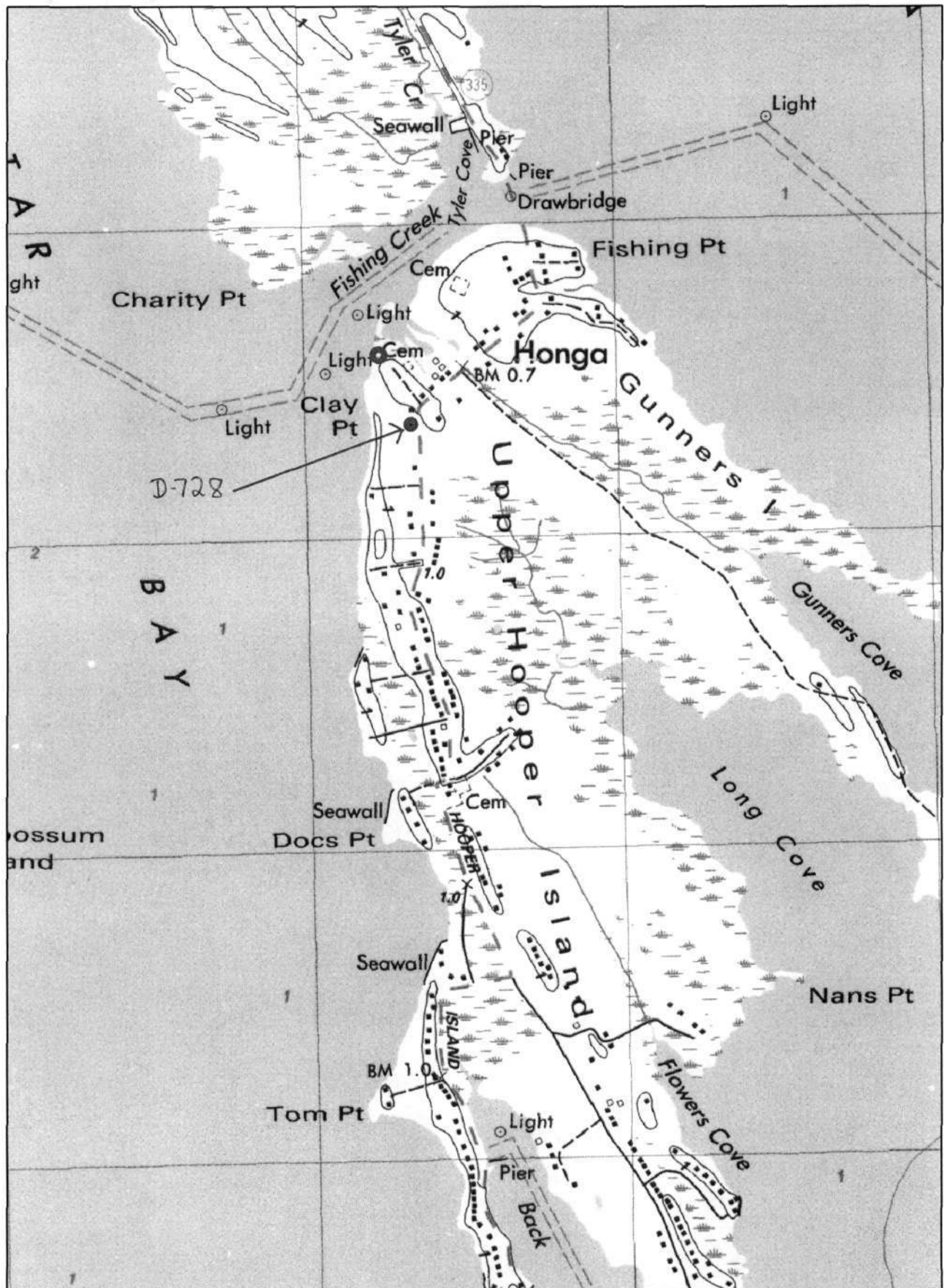
The Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties was officially created by an Act of the Maryland Legislature to be found in the Annotated Code of Maryland, Article 41, Section 181 KA, 1974 supplement.

The survey and inventory are being prepared for information and record purposes only and do not constitute any infringement of individual property rights.

return to:

Maryland Historical Trust
DHCD/DHCP
100 Community Place
Crownsville, MD 21032-2023
410-514-7600

D-728
W. T. Ruark & Co.
Fishing Creek
Honga Quadrangle





D-728

W. T. RUSSELL & Co.

Kissing Creek, Dorchester Co., Md.

Source elevation

6/2001, Paul Toward, Pittsburgh

N.E. / N.D. Historical Trust

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D-728

W. T. Runkle & Co.

Positing Creek, Dorchester Co., Md.

View of creek from Dock

6/2001, Paul Tourant, Photographer

NEL./MD. HISTORICAL TRUST

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D-728

W. T. Ruark & Co.

Asiting Creek, Dorchester Co., Md.

South Elevation

6/2001, Paul Touart, Pittwater Capital

Nat. / Md. Historical Trust

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D-728

W. T. Ruark & Co.

FISHING CREEK, DUKES COUNTY, MD.

SOUTHEAST ELEVATION

6/2001, PAUL TOWART, PHOTOGRAPHER

NEH. / MD. HISTORICAL TRUST

40K9



D-728

W. T. Ruark & Co.

Fishing Creek, Dorchester Co., MD.

Mount Elevation

6/2001, Paul Touart, Photographic

Neg. / MD. Historical Trust

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D-728

W. T. Ruark P. Co.

Fishing Creek, Dorchester Co., Md.

SOUTHEAST ELEVATION

6/2001, PAUL TOWARD, PHOTOGRAPHER

NEE / M.D. HISTORICAL TRUST

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D-728

W. T. Ruark P Co.

Fishing Creek, Dorchester Co. MD.

EAST ELEVATION

6/2001, Paul Touart, Little Canada

NEZ / MD. Historical Trust

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D-728

W. T. Ruark & Co.

Residence Creek, Dorchester Co. Md.

Report

6/2001, Paul Touart, Pitotikashen
Neg./Md. Historical Trust

9 0 K 9